

Review of the month

Welcome to the Video World Reviews pages. Every month we select a broad range of films and ask our panel of critics to give their expert opinions. Naturally all films reviewed by Video World have been granted a certificate by the British Board Of Film Censors.

DARK WATERS

Tartan Video/Louise Salter, Venera Simmons/18/94 mins

Release date - 7th September

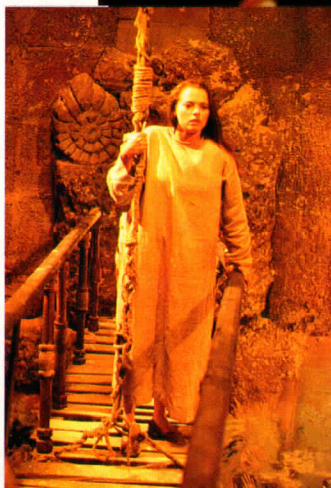


It's been a long time coming, but at last Mariano Baino's legendary low-budget horror flick has made it to the home screen - and our boy can be happy it's not on the VIPCO label!

If you're into the genre scene then you're bound to have read about this young director's Herculean struggles to get his movie finished and in front of an audience. All the fanzines have plugged it like crazy, and we even ran a piece on the movie ourselves about six months ago.

A devoted pupil of Dario Argento, Mariano couldn't get the lolly together to make his first feature (following on from his popular short, *Caruncula*) in this country. So he toddled off to complete the filming in Moscow, just as Yeltsin was taking on the local boys of the KGB. No wonder there are more than a few red herrings in the plot!

Still, none of this offscreen strife shows in the final product, which is pretty impressive for a first effort, even though it's more than a little confusing in places as well! The basic problem with *Dark Waters* is that there's not really enough story here to support the film's running time. As a short it would have been great, but at ninety odd minutes you will often find yourself checking your watch and wondering about such incidentals as what poor sod got the job of lighting all those bloody candles that seem to be in every scene! What plot there is concerns a young woman named Elizabeth (Louise Salter), a rather mournful-looking chain-smoking babe who travels to a remote Crimean island to unearth the secret that links her recently deceased father to a strange and sinister religious sect. Of course when she gets there she is greeted by lots of sinister stuff, most of which would have you or I heading for *Thomas Cook* right away. Then she finds herself stranded on the island and pursued by a nutty order of self-flagellating nuns who want her to join in their festivities! This movie is not like your average horror. In fact it has an



operatic, almost arthouse quality about it, and there are long passages where all we get is weird visuals (great camerawork by Alex Howe) and a heavy organ score that might have had more impact if used less frequently. It takes a while to get into the mood of the piece, and you wonder what the heck is going on when a spectacular wall of filth engulfs a church in the opening sequence - presumably these are the *Dark Waters* of the title?

As I said, when our Liz arrives on the island she is confronted by a sect of

crazed nuns who like to keep themselves entertained with a little whip round. She also starts to have flashbacks to her youth, when she liked to stuff her face with human munchies. Whoops - David Alton alert! In fact there are rather a lot of scenes in which people scoff unappetising things a-la Lucio Fulci. There's also a head-bashing scene that seems to go on forever, until this nun's brains are splattered all over the floor - yech. So I wouldn't suggest watching this while you're having your tea!

To give credit where it's due, *Dark Waters* has style to spare, and Mariano conjures up a terrific atmosphere of impending doom, using fluid Sam Raimi tracking camerawork and moodily composed shots of the bleak Crimean landscape. He certainly gets incredible value out of his poverty row budget, even managing to give us a decent fire stunt and a Lovecraftian monster in the finale.

Some of the acting is a bit stilted, but then so is the dialogue, and I wouldn't have fancied trying to make some of these lines sound convincing. It's an average movie with flashes of excellence that show Baino to be a man to watch in the future. It's fair to say that in the final analysis this is the kind of film that will only appeal to die-hard horror fans who are prepared to swallow a hokey plot and so-so performances as long as they get a decent quantity of gore and some visual pyrotechnics.

And if that sounds like you, then you're pretty certain to enjoy immersing yourself in *Dark Waters*...

